

PENNSYLVANIA FURNACE
.10 miles West of SR45,
South of Centre County Line
Pennsylvania Furnace
Huntingdon County
Pennsylvania

HAER No. PA-286

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

PENNSYLVANIA FURNACE

HAER No. PA-286

Location: 0.10 miles west of SR 45, just south of Centre County Line, Pennsylvania
Furnace, Franklin Township, Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania

Date of Construction: ca. 1834

Builder: John Lyon, Jacob Haldeman, and William Wallace

Present Owner: Unknown

Present Use: abandoned

Significance: One of a number of early 19th century central Pennsylvania iron works, the capacity of the Pennsylvania Furnace placed it among the region's largest. The Pennsylvania Furnace was part of a larger iron-producing enterprise, shipping its pig-iron to local forges at Sligo, Colerain, or Tyrone and from there to Pittsburgh's Sligo Works for rolling. Still extant are a retaining wall near the site of the stack, at least 3 workers' houses, the ironmaster's house and a privy.

Project Information: In 1987, the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) and the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) began a multi-year historical and architectural documentation project in southwestern Pennsylvania. Carried out in conjunction with America's Industrial Heritage project (AIHP), HAER undertook a comprehensive inventory of Huntingdon County to identify surviving historic engineering works and industrial resources.

Compiler: Gray Fitzsimons and Kenneth Rose, Editors

DESCRIPTION: The ironmaster's mansion, five or six workers' dwellings, outbuildings, an unusual agricultural building, and the furnace ruins survive at this site in northern Spruce Creek Valley, on the Huntingdon-Centre county line. Ironmaster's Mansion (1834): this L-shaped house of native limestone, measuring approximately 70' x 50', varies in height from two-and-one-half stories on the east end to a full four stories on the west. The arrangement of the three-and-one-half-story five-bay front (north) is strictly symmetrical, and includes a paneled entrance door framed by a transom and sidelights and three gable-roofed dormers. The strict symmetry of the east gable end is achieved by six false windows (appearing as closed shutters), along with double chimneys and a pair of small six-over-six-light attic windows. The west and south walls and rooflines present a unique variation on the "half-gable L," seen in local examples as a one-and-one-half-story wing with half a gable roof. Here the ell is three stories on the south and four on the west, with what may be described as a half-gambrel roof, although the pitch of the upper slope is almost flat. The bipped-roofed porch on stone piers across the front dates from about 1920; the second-story porch on the east side of the ell is probably original. The house retains most of its period detail, both inside and out. Six outbuildings of indeterminate age, including a four-square, four-door privy, are found on the mansion grounds. (For student drawings of this mansion see HABS drawings PA-611.) Furnace ruins: a high stone retaining wall extends below the charging bank, above two sizeable mounds, one of which is thought to be the ruins of the furnace stack. Worker housing: five or six two-story houses, several of them in Centre County, appear to correspond to the location of furnace housing as shown on 1873 maps. Corn Crib: this 100' x 35' double corn crib is gable-roofed with an open area between the cribs. It sits on thirteen limestone piers.

HISTORY: In 1813, a partnership of John Lyon, Jacob Haldeman, and William Wallace established a well-capitalized iron furnace on the Huntingdon-Centre county line. With water power provided by Spruce Creek, the operation was named Pennsylvania Furnace, and by 1820 employed seventy men and produced 1,000 tons of pig iron annually. Robert T. Stewart and Lyon were the owners by that date. During the following decade, additional partners were taken in to form variously named firms that established or bought shares in Sligo forges, Tyrone forges, and Huntingdon Furnace, as well as the Sligo rolling mill in Pittsburgh. John Lyon maintained his strongest interest in Pennsylvania Furnace and in 1834 built the twenty-eight-room mansion lived in by three generations of his family.

The Lyon mansion is the largest of Huntingdon County's ironmaster's houses and one of the best preserved, retaining much of its period detail, including cast-iron fireplace inserts and hand-made hardware, as well as many outbuildings. A half dozen workers' houses remain, as well as a huge double corn crib for feeding the furnace mules, the retaining wall for the charging bank, and the ore-washing site.

Pennsylvania Furnace was always part of a larger iron-producing enterprise. Pig iron produced here was turned into blooms at Sligo, Colerain, or Tyrone forges, and conveyed to the Sligo Works in Pittsburgh for rolling. The capacity of the furnace placed it among Central Pennsylvania's largest charcoal furnaces: from its initial production of about 1,000 tons of pig iron annually, its output increased to 1,500 tons by the 1820s and to almost 2,000 tons in later years. Steam machinery was added in 1856, and in 1859 the furnace was described as a "steam and water cold-blast charcoal furnace." The operation ceased in 1888.

Huntingdon and Centre counties' almost equal prominence as producers of Juniata Iron led to certain disputes concerning which county could rightfully claim Pennsylvania Furnace as its own. An 1826 Bellefonte writer asserted that the "stack, nearly all the buildings, ore-bank, coaling-ground are within Centre County," but the operation was consistently taxed and listed by the census in Huntingdon County.

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